

Hamilton Histories Well Done

By HUGH WALKER

STRANGE THINGS happen in bookdom when spring stirs the Southland. From the banks of the Mississippi, the Memphis State University has issued two new books on Hamilton County.

Two new books on Hamilton County? By the same author? Won't they compete with each other?

YES, TO ALL three questions. They will compete but with the same press and the same author, nobody will suffer. And for the reader and collector of Tennesseeana, it's all to the good. He has a choice.

The historian is James W. Livingood, who collaborated with Gilbert Gowan about 20 years ago to write the valuable *Chattanooga Country*. An emeritus professor at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, he has been a tireless researcher and prolific writer, well qualified to write these histories.

Both books were copyrighted in 1981, but from the prefaces I conclude that the longer, more definitive county history was written first. Livingood then condensed his account to fit into the formula and format of the excellent series of county histories being published by the university press.

A History of Hamilton County Tennessee is a handsome book, with a dust jacket and nearly 500 pages. Its pages unfold the story of a county and city that lie at

the southern end of the Great Valley of East Tennessee.

THE STORY STARTS with those ancient Asiatics who came down the river valleys of North

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America in very early times. It continues through the Archaic and Woodland Indians, and on down to the Cherokees and their "secesh" brothers, the Chickamaugas.

The story tells of the coming of the white men and the Brainerd mission to the Indians, and the tragedy of the Trail of Tears. We see Chattanooga influenced by the mountains and its river, finally the Dynamo of Dixie, a railway center and the gateway to Georgia and the South.

There are accounts of the great and colorful battles of Civil War days, the development of Lookout Mountain with its view of the valley, and periods of boom and bust.

THIS BOOK SELLS for \$17.50, and will probably be the choice of natives of the county and those interested in a detailed account.

The second book is much thinner, about 130 pages. But it has much to offer, and sells for \$12.50. It is in the handsome red-and-gray format of other Memphis State county histories, and has a map and many photos.

My favorite of these is the beautiful stone railroad tunnel

under Missionary Ridge, where Sherman's men found big trouble in the Battle of Chattanooga. Visitors to the Tennessee Valley Railroad Museum can still ride through this tunnel.

HAMILTON County was named for Alexander Hamilton, and Chattanooga, in the Cherokee language, meant "mountains looking at each other." The situation of the city has long been admired by Tennessee tourists, many of them honeymooners.

They have enjoyed the charm of the mountain railroad and Rock City, the beauty of the valley below and the national parks on Lookout and Missionary Ridge.

Both these books were needed, and they are likely to get a warm welcome across the state.

The history of Wilson County has long been out of print, and old and present residents will be glad to hear that a new one by Frank Burns is scheduled for

publication this year at Memphis State.

BURNS is county historian for the county, former editor of *The Lebanon Democrat*, and now a member of the English faculty of Tennessee Technological University.

With Frank Burns' background in Middle Tennessee history, this is certain to be one of the finest histories of the series.

Martha W. Torrence of Spring Hill, Tennessee (Box 104) is seeking a copy of *Thunder in the Earth*. She says it was an account of the great earthquakes of 1811, and was written by a UT professor in the 1930s.

A gentleman whose name I have misplaced wants to know where he can get a history of the Linton family of Linton, Tenn. The book can be ordered from Sarah Foster Kelley, 567 Whispering Hills Drive, Nashville 37211.